

**WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today, along with 28 members of Congress, sent a letter to House Speaker Pelosi calling on her to include critical county payments funding in the upcoming continuing resolution that leadership is currently considering.**

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“It is crucial that county payments be included in the continuing resolution,” DeFazio said. “Counties in southwest Oregon have already laid off employees by the hundreds into a bad economy -- we’ve lost sheriffs patrols, jail beds, teachers and other vital public services. It is critical that something be done now. Curry and Josephine counties could go bankrupt if the funding isn’t extended.”

DeFazio is pursuing a one-year Secure Rural Schools reauthorization in the Continuing Resolution as insurance to ensure an extension of the program. The Senate is currently working on a multi-year reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools as part of a broad renewable energy tax incentives package, but has yet to approve that legislation or send it to the House for consideration. Because the Senate legislation may not become law, whereas the Continuing Resolution must be passed by Congress in order to keep the federal government and essential programs operating, it is prudent to seek inclusion of the one-year reauthorization in the must-pass spending bill. DeFazio supports the Senate measure, and eagerly anticipates its consideration in the House.

The Secure Rural Schools Act expired on President Bush's watch with a Republican controlled Congress in 2006. Last year, the Democratic Congress gave counties a one-year extension while DeFazio continued to work on a longer-term solution. The county payments program provides nearly \$280 million a year to 33 Oregon counties for services like schools, roads and law enforcement. Counties receiving funding under the program have a high proportion of federally owned lands. Prior to the enactment of the county payments program, they had received a percentage of receipts from timber harvests, which fluctuated from year to year. However, harvest levels decreased precipitously in the late 1990s due to changes in federal forest policy. Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act in 2000 to help stabilize these payments and ensure proper funding for vital county services.

The letter is below.

September 19, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Speaker of the House

H-232 Capitol

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer

House Democratic Majority Leader

H-107 Capitol

Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Obey

Chairman, House Appropriations Committee

2314 Rayburn House Office Bldg.

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Madam Speaker, Majority Leader Hoyer, and Chairman Obey:

We write to you today to ask your support for inclusion of a one-year extension of the Secure Rural Schools program in the Continuing Resolution (CR) that Leadership is currently considering. A year ago, Congress authorized a short term extension of the Secure Rural Schools legislation on the emergency supplemental appropriations bill, which would not have happened without your leadership. Despite our best efforts, we have not been able to enact a multi-year extension of this program, so we are now seeking your support for inclusion of a one-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools legislation in the CR.

The Secure Rural Schools program aids over 600 rural counties and 4,400 school districts in 42 states. Most of these counties have fiscal years that begin in July. The expiration and loss of federal Secure Rural Schools funds has resulted in layoffs of critical county personnel and the cessation of a number of county services. These counties have closed libraries, curtailed sheriffs patrols, released prisoners from jails, ceased search and rescue operations, eliminated mental health care services, and several are considering declaring bankruptcy and giving up their county status.

There is no other option for these counties other than a federal reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools law. Under many states' laws, some of which require super-majorities, the earliest counties can attempt to raise taxes to get out of their budget shortfalls is November, long after the jails, schools, and critical infrastructure projects have shut down. Even so, there is no guarantee that voters will raise taxes during these tough economic times. Therefore, Congress must make good on its century-old promise, and give these counties a bridge until we can elect a new President who understands the value of rural communities. At that time, we will be better positioned to enact a multi-year ramp-down of the Secure Rural Schools program.

Again, we ask for your assistance in securing a one-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural

Schools legislation in the Continuing Resolution. Thank you again for your invaluable assistance in reauthorizing the critically important Secure Rural Schools program in the past, and we look forward to continuing to work with you in the very near future to bring this process to a close.

Sincerely,

Baca

Baird

Barrow

Berkley

Blumenauer

Boswell

Boucher

Brown, Corrine

Childers

DeFazio

Filner

Herseth Sandlin

Hirono

Larsen

Matheson

McNerney

Michaud

Pastor

Pickering

Rahall

Ross

Smith, Adam

Taylor, Gene

Thompson

Thompson, Bennie G.

Udall, Mark

Wilson, Charlie

Wu